



Vol. 10 No.4

25¢

Dec.
1954
18th
Year

★ ★ 15 BIG ACTION-PACKED THRILLERS ★ ★

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| 12) BATTLECUB'S SIX-GUN REDEMPTION | James Shaffer | 67 |
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| copyright 1948, Manvis Publications, Inc. | | |
| 13) LUCKY LEAD SLAMMER OR GUN KING? | Peter Dawson | 75 |
| They'd brand Russ Ordway owlhooter and rustler one day, and then Russ would get his chance to rid the range of its most ruthless landhog. copyright 1941, Newsstand Publications, Inc. | | |
| 14) BULLET FOR BULLET | Fredric Brown | 85 |
| The owlhooters allowed how the loco graybeard might bullet-nick a rattlesnake's left eye at a hundred paces—but not with an empty gun! copyright 1941, Manvis Publications, Inc. | | |
| 15) TINBADGE WHO SIDED THE BACKSHOOTER | Norman A. Fox | 91 |
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| copyright 1938, Newsstand Publications, Inc. | | |

THE ONE TO DO IT

by J. G. RITCHIE

I TIED THE roan to a jacaranda tree, slipped the Winchester carbine from the saddle scabbard, and walked cautiously toward their campfire four hundred yards away. There was only a faint rim of moon and I kept within the shadows of the manzanita and chamisal. When I was fifty yards away I stopped and went down to a prone firing position. I wanted the carbine to rest steady. I wanted one shot to do the job of killing Jim Bailey.

He and Ed Hover were alone and they hunkered about the burning mesquite chunks eating from tin plates. Bailey's back was toward me and I lined him in the sights of my carbine. My finger slipped into the trigger guard and rested on the trigger. I could shoot now, I thought, and it would be all over. I could go back to my father's ranch knowing that now my brother's murderer was dead.

But I hesitated and waited for him to turn around. From ambush was the last chance I would get to kill him, but I didn't want to shoot him in the back.

They were talking softly and I listened to the murmur of their voices while I waited. I could see the silhouette of the holstered .44 Frontier Colt that had killed at least four men in the years Bailey had spent in Elwood.

And yet Jim Bailey was free to walk without fear of the law because according to the citizen witnesses of Elwood they were fair fights. But to me and those of us who did more thinking about it, Bailey was the kind who never drew a gun against a man



Riding back through that fateful night, I knew I never should have tried to kill a man; not even a rat like Jim Bailey . . .

who was his equal. He did his gunning against ranch-hands who were more used to a lariat in their hands than a six-shooter.

He had killed my brother because Bill had made two mistakes. He had played cards with Bailey and had watched the deal too closely.

They sent me word about Bill and I went to town with two of the ranch-hands. They lifted Bill's body into the buckboard and we brought him back to our place. We buried him in the fenced plot where our mother had been put to rest five years ago.

It was a dark day with the wind pulling at our clothes and father sat in his wheelchair listening to the preacher's last words and watching his son lowered into the ground.

I saw his hopeless eyes and I knew then what I had to do and I knew that I was the only one left to do it. There were just the two of us now and father hadn't walked since the steel-dust threw him.

AFTER THE services I went back to the ranchhouse and changed clothes. I waited until the late afternoon when father took his nap, and then I strapped Bill's gun to my waist and tied the holsters down. I took four boxes of ammunition and

rode out onto the range until I was out of earshot of the house.

And then I began practicing with the Colt. I'd been born on the ranch and been out hunting with father ever since I could walk. But with rifles and shotguns; I'd never worn a six-gun.

I was slow at first and wild when I fired, but I kept at it. I kept at it until I had used the four boxes of ammunition and I was back the next day with four more. I practiced daily for three weeks, improving slowly at first and then becoming more expert until finally I knew that I was ready.

In the evening I rode into town and left my mount at the hitchrack in front of the Mesa Saloon. When I walked into the place it was filled with the noise of the drinkers and the shrill voices of the girls. I stood with my back to the swinging doors, looking for Bailey.

The loud talk drifted to silence as I was noticed. For a moment some of them might have wanted to laugh, but they saw my face and they knew I was serious. Their eyes went from me to where Jim Bailey sat over a layout of seven card stud.

He looked up as I came toward him and for a second he stared in disbelief. Then he grinned.

I stopped a dozen feet from him. "There's nothing to grin about," I said. "I'm here to kill you."

But he still smiled and near the bar somebody laughed nervously.

My hand dropped to my gun and brought it out in a motion that elicited a gasp from the spectators. For the space of ten seconds I leveled the barrel of the .41 Colt Lightning at Bailey's forehead and then re-holstered the gun.

"You can see I mean business and it won't be easy for you," I said.

His smile was thinner and he shook his head. "I can't draw on you. You know that."

"I'm not leaving until you do," I said. "Maybe it'll help if I tell you that you're a cheating tinhorn and a coward."

The smile disappeared completely and a glitter came to his eyes. "Think up all the words you want and enjoy them. But you won't get me to draw."

We stared at each other and I knew that nothing I could say or do would make him go for his gun. I knew I couldn't shoot him here if he didn't. I was angry enough to, I thought, but I couldn't do it in front of witnesses. It would mean jail and possibly even hanging for me.

I felt sick inside as I spun around and walked out without another word. The laughter began as I reached the doors and it was a roar as I mounted my horse.

FOR THE NEXT few weeks I did my work at the ranchhouse, and when I heard that Bailey was leaving for Laramie I waited outside of town until I saw him from where I was hidden.

I'd expected him to be alone, but Ed Hover, another man of Bailey's breed, rode with him. I was undecided what to do and I let them pass me and ride out of sight.

I had wanted to meet Bailey face to face and alone, where he knew he had to draw or die. But Ed Hover made it different and I realized that there was only one way I could get at Bailey before he slipped away forever. I had to shoot him from the darkness where no man could prove who had killed him. I rowelled my team and followed their trail...

And now I waited in the darkness as Jim Bailey cleaned his plate and cup with sand, and rose. He was facing me now and I put my cheek against the stock of the carbine and sighted. I felt justified anger and my finger wanted to squeeze the trigger. I wanted to see him dead and yet a dampness crept into my hands.

Bailey moved and once again his back was toward me and the moment was lost. I put my head on my arm and felt tears trickle down my cheeks. The time had come and gone and I knew now that I couldn't kill him.

I lay there for a while with despair gnawing at my heart and then I got up. I was about to leave when I looked back at them and stopped.

I noticed the way Ed Hover's eyes followed Bailey as Bailey paced back and forth in front of the fire. There was something in those eyes that told

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THE ONE TO DO IT

me he was waiting for something.

Bailey went to where his saddle bags lay on the ground and he kneeled down over them, his hands at the straps. His back was toward Hover and I might even have shouted a warning if there had been time.

Ed Hover's gun pointed at Bailey's back and he fired.

Bailey lurched forward on his face as the bullet struck. Hover walked carefully to his body and rolled him over. He reached inside of Bailey's

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shirt and unbuckled the fat money belt.

I watched him saddle up and ride away and then I returned to my mount, shivering at what I had seen and what I had almost done.

I rode slowly back through the night knowing that I could never kill a man and never should have tried. I was going to be glad to get out of levis and back into a dress and once more be only a daughter and house-keeper for my father. • END